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BOTTICELLI'S PICTURE OF THE
MIRACLES OF ST. ZENOBIUS IN
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

UNDER this title, in the June number of *Art in America*, Dr. J. P. Richter draws attention to an interesting passage in the second volume of Baron C. F. von Rumohr's *Italianische Forschungen*, published in 1827, in which that writer "mentions incidentally a picture by Botticelli—painted on panel, representing two scenes of the end of the life of St. Zenobius—which he says he bought years ago for a friend who afterwards sold it to Herr von Quandt, a collector living in Dresden. This last information," adds Dr. Richter, "enables us to identify the picture once bought by Baron von Rumohr with the one representing that subject in the Dresden Gallery, as it is known to have come from the Quandt Collection. The important point in Baron von Rumohr's short remarks on it is the information he gives about its original destination. He tells us that the picture came from the Compagnia di San Zenobio. Now, since the picture of the life of Saint Zenobius in the Metropolitan Museum is part of a series in which the whole life story of the patron saint of Florence was depicted, the early part of which is shown on the two panels in the Mond Collection, and again, as all four pictures are approximately of the same size, it follows that all four were originally set up in the same locality, that is, in the residence of the Compagnia di San Zenobio."

Dr. Richter presently goes on to cite two passages—one in the *Firenze illustrata*, of Del Migliore, ed. 1634, pp. 65–68, the other in Richa's *Notizie istoriche delle chiese fiorentine*, vol. VI, pp. 107–108—which speak of two paintings representing miracles of Saint Zenobius, once in the oratory of the Compagnia di San Zenobio dal Campanile. By Richa, these paintings were ascribed to Domenico Ghirlandaio. "It is strange," observes Dr. Richter, "that these 'fine pictures by Domenico Ghirlandaio' should not have been mentioned by Vasari or any other more or less competent early writer on art. The theory

is therefore admissible that Richa made a mistake in attributing the two pictures to Domenico Ghirlandaio. . . . The full description of one of the two 'fine pictures' seen by Del Migliore and by Richa in the house of the confraternity of S. Zenobius [that, namely, of the Miracle of the Borgo degli Albizzi] answers perfectly to one of the two [panels] now in the Mond Collection. The subject of the other, however, the Burial of the Saint [or rather the Miracle of his Translation], is depicted in none of the four panels of the Life of S. Zenobius now known, but it is, I believe, very likely that by such a representation Botticelli brought the story to an effective close. . . . Possibly Botticelli's representation of the subject, a companion picture to the one in the Metropolitan Museum, still exists and may be rediscovered unexpectedly."

But Dr. Richter is in error in supposing that the two paintings once in the possession of the Compagnia di San Zenobio are not mentioned by Vasari. Vasari not only describes them at length; but, also, attributes them to their real author, Ridolfo Ghirlandaio. That master, states Vasari, "set his hand to two other [paintings] for the Compagnia di San Zanobi, which is beside the house of the Canons of Santa Maria del Fiore; which [pictures] were to be placed on either side of the Annunciation, that Mariotto Albertinelli had formerly executed there. . . . Ridolfo, then, brought the two panels to an end, to the great satisfaction of the men of that company; executing in one, a San Zanobi who is bringing to life a boy, in the Borgo degli Albizzi, at Florence; . . . and in the other, [the story] when the said San Zanobi is carried dead from San Lorenzo, where he had been first buried, to Santa Maria del Fiore; and passing by the Piazza di San Giovanni, a withered elm which stood there, (where now, in memory of the miracle, is a column of marble with a cross above it,) that was touched by the coffin, wherein was the sacred body, suddenly, by the will of God, put forth leaves and burst into flower."

On the suppression of the Religious Confraternities of Florence, these two paintings

were taken to the Gallery of the Florentine Academy, and at a later time, in 1794, to the Uffizi, where they are still preserved, No. 1275, *The Miracle of the Borgo degli Albizzi*, and No. 1277, *The Miracle of the Translation*, and where they have long passed for Ridolfo's masterpieces.

The Religious Confraternities of Florence were not suppressed under the Napoleonic Dominion, as Dr. Richter supposes, but under the Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo, in 1786. Baron von Rumohr, who was born in 1785, must, therefore, have acquired the panel now at Dresden, long after the possessions of the Compagnia di San Zenobio dal Campanile had been dispersed, or sold. The statement, therefore, that the panel at Dresden came from the Compagnia di San Zenobio, must doubtless have been had by Baron von Rumohr, from the person from whom he acquired it, perhaps a picture-dealer. But there was more than one Compagnia di San Zenobio in Florence. Besides the Compagnia di San Zenobio dal Campanile, there was the Compagnia di San Zenobio, detta dello Specchietto della Carita, which was in Santa Maria Novella, and which in 1541 was united to the Compagnia della Scala; and there was the Compagnia della Purificazione della Madonna e di San Zenobio, detta di San Marco, for which Benozzo Gozzoli painted the beautiful altarpiece, now in the National Gallery at London. Of course, it is always possible

that the four panels of the story of Saint Zenobius, by Botticelli, may have been executed for one or another of these confraternities, though no record of the fact apparently remains. In my opinion, however, they possess rather the character of having been painted for the decoration of the private house of some religious person, who had an especial devotion to the saint. At least, they have nothing to do with the two paintings mentioned by Del Migliore and Richa, as Dr. Richter supposes.

I would conclude this note with one little incident in the history of the panel now in the Metropolitan Museum. Shortly after my book on Botticelli had appeared, Sig. Carlo Coppoli, the well-known restorer of pictures at Florence, gave me a small, faded photograph which I still possess, and in which I at once recognized a painting by Botticelli belonging to the same series as the panels in the Mond Collection and at Dresden. Sig. Coppoli informed me that the picture had been acquired many years ago by Sir William Abdy, from the well-known dealer, Baslini of Milan; that it was sent on to Florence, where it remained for some time in his studio, and where it was photographed. I, at the time, made every effort to see Sir William Abdy's pictures, but in vain. At last, the collection turned up at Christie's with the result that everyone knows.

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